

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW WITH PAULA ZAHN ON CBS-TV PROGRAM, "THIS MORNING"
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Pentagon.

Good to see you again. Thank you very much for being with us.

SEC. PERRY: Hi, Paula. Nice to talk to you again.

MS. ZAHN: Thank you. Are we any closer to understanding exactly what Saddam's intentions are at the moment, or does it just appear as though he's just trying to pressure the U.N. to lift sanctions against Iraq?

SEC. PERRY: I can't give you a confident answer to that question, Paula. I will say, though, that the buildup that he is going through now, which is the factual data we have to work on, is very similar to the buildup he went through at the time -- back in 1990, at the time he invaded Kuwait. And we have not seen a buildup like that before or since. So we have to take this very seriously that whatever is in his mind, we have to pay attention to what he is doing and act accordingly.

MS. ZAHN: Does our intelligence support that, that the numbers that we're talking about that he's building up across the southern border of Iraq would indicate an invasion is imminent?

SEC. PERRY: He has in place now many of the very same units that he brought down before the Kuwait invasion. He does not have yet the same number of units, same number of troops, same number of tanks. But he continues to move, continues to deploy. We saw a third Republican Guard division began moving just yesterday. So we're not sure of the full extent of the buildup that he has underway now. What he has done to date, though, is comparable in size and in scope and in scale to what he did at the same relative time in preparation for the Kuwait invasion.

MS. ZAHN: Given the amount of equipment he has in place, how many days away could he be from invading Kuwait, once he is able to mass his troops?

SEC. PERRY: That's a very difficult question to answer because it depends on what his invasion plan is. You can go early or you can go late, depending on whether you want to go in with a partially completed buildup. I have estimated that he would not be in the position, even on an early invasion, any sooner than the end of this week. But that's an estimate, and it's just impossible to make a precise judgment until you know what his tactical plan is.

MS. ZAHN: What specific action by Iraq would send our troops into combat?

PAULA ZAHN: Saddam Hussein is building up his military presence near the border with Kuwait. President Clinton is responding with almost 70,000 troops prepared for duty in the Persian Gulf. How close are we to another military confrontation with Iraq? Well, let's ask Defense Secretary William Perry, who joins us live this morning from the

SEC. PERRY: The first and the most obvious action would be if those troops were to go over the border into Kuwait. If that were to happen, we would be in combat immediately.

MS. ZAHN: If there is no immediate provocative action by Iraq, does that mean U.S. troops will just stay in the region indefinitely?

SEC. PERRY: No. We do not want to have large numbers of U.S. forces pinned down in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. And that doesn't make any sense at all. So I believe it is important that we resolve this crisis and that we resolve it by getting these provocative deployments removed.

MS. ZAHN: Are you concerned that the U.S. might end up in a situation where Saddam Hussein plays cat and mouse with us again, where he brings his troops to his southern part of the border, maybe goes into Kuwait a little bit, we go after him, he goes back into Iraq and then we play that cat-and-mouse game?

SEC. PERRY: If that's the game he has in mind, I think he would be very disappointed in our reaction to it, because we don't intend to play that game.

MS. ZAHN: Is there any plan that you could conceive of that would force us into Baghdad?

SEC. PERRY: I don't want to speculate on how far we would go if we actually got in a war here. I would first of all say that the forces that we are putting into Kuwait and Saudi Arabia right now should be more than sufficient to deter any rational government in Iraq. If it does not deter them and if they instead go forward with an invasion, our response will be vigorous.

MS. ZAHN: I want to move on to the topic of Haiti. You were in Haiti over the weekend with General Raoul Cedras. His resignation will happen today. What indication did he give you of whether he plans to leave the country permanently?

SEC. PERRY: We discussed two things with General Cedras; first of all, when he would step down, and he indicated at that time that he would step down very soon. And subsequently he's indicated he would leave today; that is, he would step down from office today. He also told us that he would leave the country shortly after that. And by shortly after, I would take to mean a day or two after that.

MS. ZAHN: All right. Secretary William Perry, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

SEC. PERRY: Thank you, Paula.

MS. ZAHN: We appreciate your time. We know how busy you're going to be over the next several hours.